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Abstract

"Transescents" -- the prefix "trans" meaning "to go across" and the suffix "escent" meaning "to become something" -- are young people in transition from childhccd tc adolescence. The middle school organization presents educators with an cpportunity for imprcved educational prccesses uniquely suited to students of this age group. Transescents are in transition physically, mentally, and socially, each developing according to his own timetable. This diversity in maturation rates creates diversity in interests and attitudes, thus precipitating irregular social and emotional patterns. The purpose of this paper is to suggest programs for the transescent level. Attention shculd specifically be given tc curriculum, grouping techniques, and guidance programs. The middle school can be a dynamic program of educatiocn for transescents if educators understand the complexities of this age group and are willing to create programs suited to its unique characteristics. Related documents are EA 002 527 and EA 002 642. (Author/MF)

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Planning Programs for Transescents

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by

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Educators are beginning to view the emerging middle school organization with considerable hope. Spokesmen for this reorganized level consistently hold that the middle school offers an opportunity for constructive educational progress. Particularly critical of the programs found in the junior high school, these middle school advocates argue that the time has come for significant change in the phases and patterns of education for youngsters in the years between the elementary school and high school.

Williams[1] cautions, however,

> Middle schools across the nation have succeeded, for the most part, in rejecting inappropriate activities. Many schools have eliminated the sponsorship of school dances, for example, but very few have come up with an appropriate alternative. The elimination of interscholastic athletics has not yet been matched by the initiation of an appropriate pre adolescent activity. Much more time and creative thought must be invested in this area.

In a practical sense the expanding middle school movement has created a dilemma. Ironically, some middle school educators have stayed with the programs of the junior high school while others have eliminated former programs with little or no thought given to new programs. In this regard, Alexander[2] concluded, based on a survey of 1101 middle schools,

> They (survey results) also indicate that the new middle school organizations in general fail to provide a program and instructional organization differing very much from those in the predecessor schools especially in the grade 7-9 junior high school.

Curtis[3], however, indicated, based on a survey of middle schools in New York State, that the blending of elementary and secondary practices and teacher attitudes into something different from each had occurred.

There is little doubt that the middle school organization presents educators

with a fine opportunity for improved educational processes. The fundamental need, however, is to develop programs which are uniquely suited to youngsters of this age. Unless such programs emerge, there is little justification for a reorganized transitional school.

It seems essential, as an initial step in planning programs, to discuss the nature of the middle school student. There is no attempt, here, at an exhaustive treatment of age characteristics; nevertheless, it seems appropriate to briefly analyze the nature of the transescent.

The middle school child may best be characterized as a youngster in transition. Alexander et.al[4] have described middle school youngsters as "in between agers" with the connotation that these boys and girls are moving from childhood to adolescence. Similarly, Eichhorn[5] has labeled these students as "transescents"--the prefix "trans" meaning "to go across" and the suffix "escent" meaning "to become something." In either case, the concept of separateness is implied.

Transescents are in transition physically, mentally, and socially. Physically, the student moves through a series of changes which transform the child physiologically into an adult. Mentally, the child moves from a stage of concrete operations in which the cognitive processes center on the tangible to the formal operations stage in which the child acquires the ability to relate in the abstract. Socially, the transescent develops from a stage of dependence on parents for attitudes and values to a state of dependence on the peer group for similar security forces.

It is significant that these growth changes do not occur in a uniform manner; rather, each youngster develops according to his own timetable. This diversity in maturation ratescreates diversity in interests and attitudes thus precipitating irregular social and emotional patterns. It is precisely these differences

which necessitate the development of programs which differ from elementary or high school programs.

The purpose of this paper is to suggest programs from the transescent level. It can not be overly emphasized that these programs should be designed specifically for transescence. They should not be modified high school programs nor conversely upgraded elementary approaches. Attention should specifically be given to curriculum, grouping techniques, and guidance programs.

Curriculum

There is a need to restructure the present curriculum of most transitional schools. This is due fundamentally to the philosophic inconsistency around which most middle school programs are developed. In one respect, curriculum makers theoretically accept the premise of Havighurst[6] who states, "The period from twelve to eighteen is primarily one of physical and emotional maturing... The principal lessons are emotional and social, not intellectual." Yet, these same curriculum developers create curricular goals heavily emphasizing the cognitive area and only in part do they reflect the affective domain. There can be no quarrel with the point of view which states cognitive learning is vital; however, one must argue that at the transescent level social and emotional needs are, at least, as crucial.

A curriculum model for transescence should be comprehensive. As suggested, it is not enough to create programs solely for the cognitive area. Conversely, efforts directed largely toward the social-emotional facets of curriculum will not create an adequate program. An effective curriculum model must be all inclusive if the needs of transescents are to be met.

The characteristics and educational needs of transescents suggest a

revitalized curriculum model composed of the following components:

1. Analytical
2. Dynamics
3. Self Expression

The analytical facet includes the traditonal areas of mathematics, science, and language. It is best characterized by learning which is logical, sequential, and cognitive. Due to the diverse range of transescent learning levels, this component should be highly individualized with students progressing at a rate compatible with their abilities, interests, and aptitudes. Learning objectives should be devised in behavioral terms with emphasis placed on the transition from the concrete to the abstract stages of difficulty or as Bruner[7] contends from the iconic to the symbolic.

The dynamics component is intended as a significant departure from the traditional programming. The basic thrust inherent in this facet revolves around transescents gaining a thorough knowledge of their growth patterns. The vast reservoir of research data reported by scholars such as Mary Cover Jones[8], Nancy Bayley[9], and others consistently indicate that youngsters in this growth level need to understand physical and social growth patterns if they are to successfully meet the challenges of this age. Strang[10] concludes in this regard,

> Facts about the physical growth preceding and following puberty are important for a number of reasons. Bodily changes, especially if sudden, change the adolescent's body image and self concept... Biological changes give rise to physical sensations; these are translated into emotional states, which in turn may be expressed in social behavior. Slow or rapid growth, unevenness of growth, or abnormalities of growth may affect an adolescent's total development.

It seems vital, therefore, that innovative curricular programs in the areas of growth and development, social dynamics, and physical activities appropriate to transescent should emerge.

The third curriculum component suggested for transescence is self expression. Although possessing much of the ideology of dynamics, it differs in its emphasis. Considerable research concerning creative or divergent mental development has been recorded but very little curriculum development has employed its findings. The characteristic needs of the transescent in this respect create fertile ground for its inclusion into a currciulum model. The individuality embodied in creative expression is natural and contributes greatly to the transescent who is striving for independence.

Grouping

Previously, it was stated that cognitive factors dominate present curriculum models. It is equally accurate to state that cognitive factors largely control present grouping formulas. Even a cursory review results in the belief that this overriding emphasis creates significant social-emotional problems for those youngsters who, at least, temporarily are achieving at a slower academic rate. Criteria involving I.Q. scores, achievement levels, and grades are usually espoused as fundamentals in the grouping process.

This approach to grouping seems illogical in light of the fundamental goals of transitional education. Again, considerable research concerning maturation may hold the key to improved grouping techniques. Simmons and Gruelich[11] report that girls experience their greatest height growth in the year preceding menarche. Clements, Davies-Thomas, and Pickett[12] indicate that eruption of the second molar is associated with the onset of puberty. Tanner[13] concludes that myopia is a frequent indicator of pubescence. Schools traditionally examine youngsters in these physical areas and it seems plausible to utilize a grouping formula involving these characteristics. When coupled with sociometric analysis, the transescent educator may be able to project a more functional basis for student

grouping.

Guidance Environment

A guidance environment is logically thought of as an integral facet of the educational program for transescents. Every program at the middle school level must be guidance oriented. Certainly, it seems acceptable to assume that activities which assist youngsters in meeting social and emotional stress will aid their e olving adjustment processes. There are many programs which could be cited; however, one such program may serve to illustrate guidance involvement. This program call a "social" will be used for this purpose.

In place of boy-girl dances characteristic of the high school, the social consists of activities appropriate for this age. Large group activities such as mixers and square dances, vaudeville type skits, and games are usually well received by transescents. Research evidence presented by Meyer[14] and by Harris and Tseng[15] provide programmers with reasons why these type activities are more appropriate. These researchers disclose that at this age attitudes toward same-sex peers are more reinforcing than attitudes involving opposite sex-peers.

It should be emphasized that transescents need to be totally involved in the planning and conduct of guidance activities. Transescents need to gain success and confidence. These favorable attitudes are achieved by middle school youngsters when they successfully meet the various challenges created by planning responsibilities. As they strive for independence, social interaction of this nature is invaluable.

Planning transescent programs is the most important activity in which middle school educators can engage. Experience with formal models for transitional education such as the 7-9 junior high school has pointedly indicated the importance

of such development. The middle school can be a dynamic program of education for transescents providing that educators understand the complexities of this age group and are willing to create programs suited to its unique characteristics.

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